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Engineering Hybrid Conflict Toward a Deconstructive Vision of Engineered Conflict and Managed Structural Fragility National Security in the Age of Unc

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Prologue

This series was not born of a passing academic curiosity, nor of a theoretical indulgence practiced in the isolation of an ivory tower; rather, it emerged as an existential labor bearing the full metaphysical weight that term implies -a genuine intellectual and psychological

struggle endured by the author in the crucible of the great upheavals that swept the Arab region, known collectively as the "Arab Spring." At that moment when the solid continents of certainty themselves began to fracture, the researcher -a security professional who had known the field before he came to know theory, and who tasted the dust of reality before inhaling the fragrance of abstraction -found himself confronting a scene at once complex and painful, closer to a canvas evoking collapse and the unveiling of what had long been concealed than to any cold political report: states fracturing from within as pottery cracks when fired beyond its tolerance; societies disintegrating at their bonds as atomic ties dissolve in a silent explosion; and individuals losing their psychological and moral compass simultaneously, beneath the cover of slogans raised in the name of change, freedom, and dignity — slogans that became masks for what was never meant to be declared. Nor was the author himself untouched by this existential earthquake; Egypt, like other Arab Spring nations, lived through political, economic, social, and cultural repercussions of profound depth, leaving in the consciousness of all who witnessed them questions never before posed with such existential urgency, nor with the intensity of a cry from a being who suddenly discovers the fragility of the ground beneath its feet.

From this direct lived experience — not from books alone, but from the very flesh and blood of events — arose the question that the researcher carried as his banner for years to come: Were these revolutions merely a transient emotional outburst, an immediate mass reaction soon swallowed by forgetting? Or did they carry within them a deeper possibility — the possibility of authentic transformation, the kind of transformation that reshapes being itself before it reshapes maps? Here the researcher recalled the argument advanced by Gustave Le Bon in *The Psychology of Revolution*, where he broadened the concept of revolution to encompass every sudden transformation in beliefs, ideas, and convictions, not merely political change, distinguishing between scientific revolutions arising from purely rational elements that people accept without dispute because they submit to the test of experience, and political and religious revolutions built on emotional and metaphysical foundations bearing no connection to reason (Le Bon, 1913). This distinction was the first spark that illuminated the darkness

of the researcher's inquiry: why did revolutions once hoped to bring radical transformation in thought, culture, and collective consciousness collapse instead into mere superficial political and social changes — indeed, in many cases, into the demolition of the states themselves rather than their reform, as one who burns down the temple to warm his hands for a single night? The researcher remains convinced - indeed, his conviction has only deepened -that authentic revolution is not an act of destruction but an act of construction and development; not an end in itself, but a bridge toward an intellectual and cultural renaissance that must precede any political or institutional change, for nations are not built upon the ruins of their own consciousness.
The anxiety that gripped the researcher was no fleeting emotion destined to vanish with the passing of its occasion; it was, in its essence, an *existential anxiety* in the precise philosophical sense — closer to what Martin Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, termed *Angst*, as distinct from fear (*Furcht*), which attaches to a specific, identifiable object one may confront directly. Anxiety, by contrast, attaches to nothing in particular; it is bound to "nothingness and no-place," which suddenly renders the whole world devoid of meaning, suspended in a groundless void (Heidegger, 1962, p. 233). When the researcher contemplated the fates of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, Sudan, and others, he did not see before him disconnected political incidents peculiar to each nation, but rather a single recurring pattern -akin to a funeral dirge played on different instruments across multiple stages: states drained from within until they lose the capacity to protect the boundaries of their identity before their geographic borders; societies driven toward civil fragmentation until they can no longer agree even on a minimal common set of values; and individuals transformed into fuel for conflicts in which they hold no say and whose purpose they do not understand -like leaves scattered by a wind whose origin they cannot trace. What deepened this anxiety further was that the phenomenon was no longer confined to the Arab region alone; Europe itself, long presented as a stable model of modern state institutions and a stronghold of political rationality, began to exhibit fractures in its social and political fabric, while Africa sank into vortices of coups, civil wars, and entangled foreign interventions. From this emerged a question carrying profound philosophical unease, akin to a Job-like cry before the enigma of systematized evil: How did the world come to this condition? Is there a hidden logic explaining this global synchrony of fragility, or is this merely a random accumulation of disconnected crises — chaos with no underlying order?
This inquiry led the researcher to scrutinize the nature of the actors driving this landscape, revealing that agency was no longer confined to sovereign states as classical theories of international relations had long assumed. The stage had widened -as a horizon widens when the curtain is raised on a deeper scene -to include non-state actors who moved with a flexibility far exceeding that of states themselves, exploiting institutional vacuums and societal fragility as water exploits the smallest crack in a wall. Foremost among these actors stand armed terrorist groups bearing extremist

ideologies, which did not confine themselves to destabilizing conventional security but pressed on toward a deeper and more dangerous target: the penetration of the very system of human values and religious constants, and the attempt to seize religious discourse and distort it from its tolerant context in service of a closed ideological project bearing no relation to the true essence of religion nor to its authentic purposes of mercy, justice, and civilizational flourishing — an usurpation of the sacred, deploying it as a mask for the profane.

From another vantage point, the researcher recognized -by virtue of his field experience in security work, and through that insight granted only to those who have stood at the very edge of events rather than behind a desk -a fundamental paradox lodged at the heart of security practice like an undiagnosed wound: we, as security professionals, learned for a long time how to achieve security, preserve it, and restore it when threatened, yet we did not learn with equal depth to ask more fundamental questions: Who threatens our security? How is threat produced against others? Why do certain states manufacture feelings of fear and uncertainty in other states and societies — as one who masters the manufacture of darkness in order to later sell artificial light? From here, the researcher's inquiry shifted from the management of security to the understanding of threat itself; from the question "How do we protect security?" to a more foundational question, closer to an ontological inquiry in the fullest sense: "How is that which we need protection from actually manufactured in the first place?" This is a shift concerning not merely the expansion of the subject of study, but a reconsideration of the very epistemological starting point -a small Copernican inversion within the field of security studies: rather than treating threat as a given prior to analysis, fixed as the stars, the scientific challenge becomes uncovering how threat is formed, perceived, framed, and transformed into political, security, and social action.

When the researcher sought a firmly established scientific designation to frame this problem, it became evident that this endeavor remains, at best, in an early stage of epistemic formation — resembling a continent whose contours have not yet been fully mapped. The project of building "Threat Studies" as a more distinct field of inquiry within the space of international relations and security studies remains nascent, not yet having attained the institutional maturity that would allow it to be treated as an independent discipline. Nonetheless, recent efforts have emerged that seek to move beyond traditional approaches treating threat as a fixed given, toward interrogating how it is constructed, perceived, framed, and politically, economically, and socially mobilized (Uygur & Sever, 2025). In this context, a metaphor advanced by Uygur and Sever acquires profound interpretive value: whereas *security studies* concern themselves with threats as they appear on the surface of the phenomenon - where our eyes collide with

the visible tip of the iceberg protruding above the water - *threat studies* plunge into the deeper structure that makes that appearance possible and consequential; that is, they do not content themselves with the tip of the iceberg but descend into its dark depths, into that vast submerged mass invisible to the eye which precedes the visible, explains it, and grants it its capacity to exert influence (Uygur & Sever, 2025). The importance of this shift lies not in coining a new epistemic label, but in the reorientation of the very angle of vision itself - a wholesale inversion in the locus of observation: from studying security as a condition to be preserved, as one preserves a flame from extinguishing, to studying threat as a process susceptible to engineering, production, perception, framing, and instrumentalization - that is, a living process rather than a static entity. The question thus ceases to be confined to "How do we confront threat?" and extends instead to: How does threat form before it becomes an object of confrontation? Who possesses the capacity to produce it, direct its perception, determine its timing, and expand its effects?

It is precisely from this point that the path begins which leads to the broader problematic of this series - to that question standing at the very edge of an epistemic abyss: If threat can be engineered, produced, managed, and instrumentalized, can it, in certain contexts, be transformed from a mere instrument of pressure into a deliberate process for reshaping the conflict environment itself -that is, from a means in the hand of the actor into an end through which reality itself is re-fashioned?

This foundational question - how threat is manufactured, and who determines the classification of a given act as a threat warranting a security response- is not a novel concern suddenly arising in the researcher's thinking, but rather a direct organic extension of an earlier research problematic he himself addressed, when he interrogated the boundaries separating the exercise of freedom of assembly and demonstration as a guaranteed right, from the instrumentalization of national security considerations to regulate, restrict, or criminalize that right (El zont, 2020). Yet this nascent field, notwithstanding the significance of its early intimations, has to this day remained captive to a general approach toward the phenomenon of "threat" in its broadest sense, without penetrating the structural specificity of the manufacture of fear and threat within the hybrid, composite context to which this series is devoted -as though the road had been carved only to its

midpoint, leaving the researcher to complete what remains of the path toward its depths.

In pursuit of an answer transcending the initial impression toward rigorous scientific grounding, the researcher returned to his personal library, as the lost traveler returns to his lighthouse, and revisited the foundational literature in national security, strategic studies, and political, social, and humanistic philosophy that underpins the constitutive ideas of this field of knowledge. In this context, the researcher renewed his acquaintance with Norbert Wiener in the science of automatic control - cybernetics - and returned to the foundational systems sciences, both social and human, and reexamined anew the proceedings of the Macy Conferences, tracing how mathematical, engineering, and technical concepts migrated from the domain of the pure sciences into the space of the social and human sciences — a conceptual migration that transformed the face of social science in its entirety — and how the idea of control gradually took shape: from the machine to the state, from the state to society, and from society to the human being itself, in a progression resembling the slow spread of a shadow that widens by degrees until it swallows the light entirely. Wiener himself warned against this trajectory when he described the reduction of the human being to a mere functional instrument as treating him as "cogs and levers and rods," rather than as a being possessed of dignity and full entitlement (Wiener, 1954, p. 185) - a warning carrying within it an early prophecy that was not heeded as it deserved.

Nor did the researcher stop with Wiener alone along this cybernetic path; he extended his inquiry to Vladimir Lefebvre, who developed-starting from that same cybernetic foundation -a more specialized theory of cognitive engineering known as Reflexive Control Theory. Its central premise is that an actor can engineer the very cognitive basis upon which an adversary builds his decision, such that the adversary - believing himself to be exercising his own free will - selects the alternative that serves the interest of the first actor, without realizing that he has been led into a decision manufactured in advance, like a thread pulled from behind a curtain while the puppet believes itself to be dancing of its own accord (Lefebvre, 1992). This theory, in its mathematical and psychological essence, is nothing but a contemporary formulation — rendered in the language of computation and probability - of an ancient wisdom established by Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* more than twenty-four centuries ago, when he declared that "all warfare is deception" (Sun Tzu, 1963), and that the pinnacle of military skill lies not in subduing the enemy's army in battle, but in breaking its will and directing its perception before the battle ever erupts -indeed, before the enemy even senses that a battle has begun. More than twenty-four centuries separate Sun Tzu and Lefebvre, a span crossing the whole of history, yet they converge on a single unchanging essence: that true control is exercised not over the adversary's actions, but over the image through which

he perceives the world before acting upon it -for whoever possesses the enemy's eye possesses his steps. This is the theoretical bridge that later paved the way for applications of "reflexive control" within contemporary Russian military doctrine (Thomas, 2004), applications this series will examine in detail in their proper place.
Upon further reflection, the researcher came to see that these questions were never merely the offspring of the present moment alone, but have remained, throughout history, an abiding concern of philosophers and scholars — a resonant echo through the corridors of intellectual history. Plato, in the myth of the cave in the *Republic*, portrayed bound prisoners who see nothing but moving shadows on the wall, so thoroughly convinced that those shadows are reality itself that anyone who attempts to free one of them and lead him toward the light risks being killed by his fellow prisoners, should they be able to do so (Plato, *Republic*, Book VII, 514a–520a)- a metaphor whose brilliance has not dimmed despite twenty-five centuries, illuminating the resistance that engineered minds mount against any attempt at intellectual liberation. Aristotle, in the *Politics*, established his enduring dictum that man is "by nature a political animal" (Aristotle, *Politics*, Book I, 1253a), reminding us that to target the human being is to target his social-political nature itself, not an individual isolated from his collective fabric - for there is no human outside the city save a beast or a god. Socrates, meanwhile, remained - through his dialectical method of questioning and deconstruction, the very craft that cost him his life as the price of his intellectual freedom — the first model of one who confronts the collective mind's "susceptibility" to unthinking compliance, the very same dilemma this book addresses from a contemporary angle. These ideas then passed through the Enlightenment via Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, in an unbroken chain of reflection on the fate and freedom of the human being, until they crystallized in the mid-twentieth century into General Systems Theory, strategic management, and national security studies in their contemporary form.
While drawing upon this Western philosophical heritage, the researcher did not neglect the Arab intellectual legacy, which addressed a dimension of this problem no less important - perhaps even more profound: how does the collective self prepare itself, internally, to accept penetration before it occurs, and how is the door opened from within before it is ever knocked upon from without? Malek Bennabi, in *The Conditions of the Renaissance*, established the concept of "colonizability" (*al-qābiliyya lil-isti'mār*), affirming that colonialism is not solely the product of politicians and their actions, but springs from the very soul that accepts submission to it and enables it to take root in its own land- and that liberation from it cannot come through rhetoric alone, but through an internal psychological transformation by which the individual reclaims his social dignity (Bennabi, n.d.). Hisham Sharabi, in *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, developed the concept of "neopatriarchy," explaining it as the product of the conjunction of imperialism with traditional patriarchal structure, generating hybrid societies belonging neither to authenticity nor to modernity, but suspended

between two worlds, possessing the key to neither (Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, p. 33). And George Tarabishi, in his extensive critical project *Critique of the Critique of Arab Reason*, offered a methodological model for deconstructing intellectual structures and reconstructing them on more rigorous foundations, concluding that Arab-Islamic reason constitutes — despite the plurality of its rhetorical, demonstrative, and gnostic currents — a single, unified epistemic system (Tarabishi, *The Unity of Arab-Islamic Reason*).
In our present age, amid the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the deluge of information, big data, and the technologies of their processing and dissemination, the researcher came to understand that the crisis experienced by his homeland and nation at the outset of the second decade of the third millennium was but one chapter in a far broader and more encompassing phenomenon — an epic whose pages remain unfolded, still being written at this very moment in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and Libya, its echoes reverberating across Europe and Africa: states afflicted by dispersion, societies afflicted by disintegration, and human beings afflicted by confusion and loss — like a ship that has lost its compass in the midst of a shoreless sea.

From all of this, this series emerged as a serious attempt to understand how security actors- whether states or non-state entities- think about the demolition of our states and societies, indeed about the penetration of the human being himself from within, from that secret place beyond the reach of the watchman's eye. The research question is no longer confined to "Who targets us?" but extends to encompass: By what instruments does penetration occur? By what means is it engineered? And how does it travel from idea to action, from cognitive penetration to institutional and social disintegration? We are living, with all the weight that phrase carries, a decisive and pivotal moment in the history of our nation-a moment in which every possibility converges at a single point, at an irreversible crossroads: to be, or not to be. The researcher drew upon, in formulating this awareness, the statement made by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, in his 2015 remarks, that what Egypt and the Arab nation face is "a war of existence, not a war of borders" (El-Sisi, 2015) - the very same meaning the researcher had earlier deployed in his analysis of the phenomenon of intellectual and electronic penetration targeting youth (Al-Zant, n.d.), before this early insight matured into the integrated theoretical framework this series now presents. Contemporary wars, as their manifestations in our Arab surroundings reveal, are no longer drawn on maps nor decided by armies alone; they target, in their deepest essence, the very being of the state, the identity of society, and the meaning of the human being - a war upon existence itself before it is a war upon geography.

From this awareness, this series takes its departure- not as a cold academic diagnosis read with the detachment of a spectator, but as an attempt to understand

the mechanisms of this existential war, in preparation for building a consciousness capable of confronting it. For emotional awareness alone- however sincere and however fervent -remains incomplete until it is transformed from a feeling into a method, from anxiety into a question susceptible to research and analysis; for darkness is not vanquished by grieving over it, but by understanding its nature. Knowing that the state, society, and the human being are targeted in their very being does not, by itself, suffice to understand how this targeting occurs, by what instruments it is managed, nor according to what logic it recurs across time and place. From here, this series moves from the register of philosophical contemplation to the register of methodological foundation, to pose its central research question- a question that is, in its essence, the question of our age: Is there a single structural logic governing this transformation from traditional conflict to contemporary hybrid conflict? And if such a logic exists, how may it be deconstructed, understood, and confronted?

As the reader moves from the register of this existential reflection into the pages of this series, three analytical axes will unfold successively as the operational translation of everything argued above. **The first** is that contemporary hybrid conflict transcends the traditional boundaries separating military from non-military instruments, fusing hard power with soft power, and the cyber domain with the economic instrument, into a single, integrated system of deployment in which no component can be understood in isolation from the others. **The second** is that structural fragility within states is no longer an incidental defect to be remedied, but has increasingly become a terrain deliberately invested in - institutional, social, and economic weaknesses transformed from internal shortcomings into entry points for external influence and instruments for deepening structural erosion. The third is that the clear front lines once characteristic of conventional warfare have dissolved, giving way to an environment in which state and non-state actors converge in the management of protracted, temporally extended crises - crises decided not by a single battle, but managed through a long, cumulative process that traditional analytical tools struggle to track. **These three axes** - the integration of instruments, the investment of fragility, and the dissolution of front lines - are precisely what the chapters of this series

will proceed to deconstruct and theoretically ground, chapter by chapter.

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Series currently in press